

to the max

Fancy aerobic routines aren't the only way to get a killer workout. **Milissa Deitz** reveals how the simplest routines can really build up your bod, not to mention your fitness levels.

The good news is you don't have to work up a huge sweat to feel the benefits of exercise, according to the Australian Heart Foundation. The bad news is you do have to exercise regularly. "In order to improve cardiovascular fitness, a regular program of aerobic exercise is essential," says Body + Soul's resident personal trainer, Tasha Labrood. As well as controlling your weight, regular exercise will give you a healthier blood cholesterol level, lower blood pressure, help you live longer, and reduce your risk of a heart attack.

And you don't have to master complex aerobic routines to get those benefits. Even the most uncoordinated among us can boost our fitness with a basic program of walking, running or swimming. To get maximum results from a simple workout, Tasha Labrood uses the FITT principle — frequency, intensity, type and time.

frequency — aim to impress

Whether you swim, cycle, jog or walk, aim to do it three times a week. And you need to keep it up because after a break of four to six weeks, your fitness level will have dropped by half, so all your previous hard work will have been wasted.

intensity — when less is more

Go at your own pace. Beginners should stick to 60 to 70 per cent of their maximum heart rate, otherwise you should aim for 70 to 80 per cent.

Exercising more intensely is not necessarily better — if you build up gradually to a higher level of exercise, your body gets the chance to recover as you go along.

type — any old heart starter

You can develop your cardiovascular endurance with any activity that can be done continuously at a sustained rate, whether that's swimming, walking, jogging, cycling, skipping, roller-blading or aerobics.

time — pace yourself

To get any aerobic benefits, you need to exercise for at least 15 minutes. After an hour, the returns start to lessen. Always stretch for five to 10 minutes to warm up and five minutes to cool down afterwards.

Labrood says whether you run, walk, cycle or use a step machine, the following is an easy workout to start with: "Determine your maximum heart rate by subtracting your age from 220. Start warming up for five minutes at an easy pace, then gradually increase the pace until you have reached 60 to 80 per cent of your maximum heart rate. Maintain this for about 15 minutes. Cool down for five minutes. If you want to increase the time you spend exercising, add no more than 10 per cent of the original time each week."

Sticking with one activity you enjoy is tempting, but it can also sabotage your progress. Janie Larmour, a personal trainer based in Bondi, says variety ensures your body keeps responding. "If you only do one sort of exercise, your chances of becoming bored and giving up are greater and you aren't getting as many benefits and results as you would with a mixed program," she says. Larmour advises setting goals to stay motivated, but says you should make sure they are achievable. "It's realistic to imagine being half a kilo lighter every week, or six your heart to be stronger, or to walk, jog or swim that extra half a kilometre in one week."



“Even the most uncoordinated can boost their fitness with a basic program of walking, running, or swimming”



keeping it simple ...but not easy

Here are some simple ways to pump up the results from your favourite activities:

the walker

You should build up to walking for 30 to 40 minutes at least four times a week. If necessary, it can be done in 10 minute blocks.

Personal trainer Janie Larmour doesn't recommend carrying hand weights. "They can cause back problems in the long term." But there are other ways to add extra power to your program:

- Climb a set of stairs a few times.
- Find the odd hill and try to keep the same pace as you would on a flat surface.
- Once a week, go on a really long walk.
- Add variety by changing where you walk. You might want to jump in the car and park somewhere you haven't explored. Just make the effort to keep your walks interesting.
- Increase your pace. A lot of people think they should only go as fast as they can comfortably breathe. You should be able to talk, but not as if you are at the dinner table.
- Wear comfortable walking/running shoes.

the runner

Your aims are similar to the walker. But beyond that, to pump up the intensity:

- Find stairs and hills, but be careful on the way down as the impact on your knees is 10 times more than with walking.
- Vary the length of time that you run.
- Change locations regularly.
- Wear good running shoes to avoid shin splints.

the swimmer

Swimming is the safest exercise of all because the water supports your body. Even then, once you get comfortable in a routine, spice things up a bit.

- Change your stroke — if you regularly do freestyle, try backstroke or breaststroke.
- Wear a T-shirt. This will slow you down so you have to work harder.
- Place yourself against your best times.

For all forms of exercise, remember to warm up beforehand and cool down afterwards by doing at least a few minutes of stretching. Stretching out your major muscle groups in the legs, arms, chest and back will also help avoid the risk of injury.

SHOOTING BY GARY

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